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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MEXICO 002098

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KCRM](#) [SNAR](#) [MX](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY MEXICO'S POLYGRAPH PROGRAM

¶1. (SBU) Summary. In 2008, the Mexican government approached the U.S. Embassy Mexico City for assistance with vetting federal officials through the use of polygraph technology and stringent background checks. Building on existing cooperation mechanisms, we created a bilateral polygraph working group. The FY2008 Merida Supplemental appropriated five million for the program; the FY2009 budget has earmarked an additional six million. While the polygraph program will take several years to produce highly-trained polygraphers capable of maintaining and replicating standards across the Mexican interagency, this program under the Merida Initiative significantly improves the capacity of GOM authorities to draft and keep honest cops, prosecutors and soldiers. End Summary

Hardly Starting from Scratch

¶2. (SBU) The USG has long supported the GOM in credibility assessment and polygraph matters, in particular through our relationship with PGRQ's Centro de Confianza -- today known as the Center for Human Development (CeDH). The CeDH is a pre-employment examination center that conducts interviews and administers written examinations, psychological interviews and testing, and polygraph examinations of all who apply to work for the Attorney General (PGR). Since 2000, the USG has provided CeDH with training and polygraph equipment, including polygraph machines and video cameras. In 2007, the USG upgraded CeDH's polygraph machines; in 2008, we sent Mexican polygraph examiners to the yearly polygraph convention in the U.S. In support of the GOM's goal to increase the number of polygraph examiners nationwide, the Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) and Legal AttachQ's Office teamed up to create and fund, at a cost of \$400,000, a ten week recertification course that included initial training at the Department of Public Safety Academy in Austin.

Merida Initiative and Mexico's Contribution

¶3. (SBU) Following up on President Felipe Calderon's commitment in his August 2008 state of the union address to rid the police and judiciary of corruption, the PGR requested we assist it in assessing and enhancing the credibility of its work force. Building on our existing relationship, Merida Initiative programs expanded the reach of our efforts to Mexican Customs (Aduanas) and the Mexican Immigration Services (INAMI). The Letter of Agreement (LOA), signed in February 2009 between four Mexican federal agencies (SSP,

PGR, Aduanas, and INAMI) and the Embassy, established that the United States would provide U.S. federal law enforcement advisors to train Mexican polygraphers on the latest procedures and standards, as well as provide state-of-the-art equipment.

¶4. (SBU) Separately, the U.S. and the GOM created a bilateral polygraph working group entrusted with establishing priorities for MI funding. Congress appropriated five million dollars from the FY2008 Merida Supplemental for the polygraph program; we anticipate receiving an additional six million in FY2009 spending. These U.S. funds complement SSP program investments of over three million dollars in equipment, infrastructure, and personnel training over the last two years. Other GOM agencies have also increased their funding of polygraph programs.

¶5. (SBU) At this juncture, SSP and PGR both employ trained polygraphers. Aduanas and INAMI, meanwhile, have just begun to stand up their programs. CISEN has a polygraph school. It is also establishing processes and procedures for all of Mexico's polygraph programs. To date, however, other Mexican agencies have only had limited contact and exposure to CISEN's polygraph program.

The Players

¶6. (SBU) There are currently several stakeholders in the bilateral polygraph working group. The Mexican participants in the program are SSP, PGR, Aduanas, and INAMI. Based on a

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recent recommendation of the working group, the GOM identified CISEN as the lead agency responsible for coordinating polygraph standards in Mexico. CISEN will assume a role comparable to that assumed by the U.S. Defense Academy for Credibility Assessment (DACA) in that it will be the sole entity promulgating polygraph training, standards and processes across the Mexican federal government. ICE, ATF, U.S. Secret Service, CBP, DEA, the U.S. Marshal Service, FBI, NAS and the Embassy Information Services office are the identified participants in the working group from the Embassy. All U.S. agencies coordinate with their Mexican counterparts and with each other to ensure consistency of program implementation, polygraph examination standards and efficient use of MI funding.

More Complicated Than You Think

¶7. (SBU) The Mexican government aims to create a cadre of 500 polygraphers. This will take time, however, as a well managed, consistent polygraph program requires more than just new equipment and initial training. Polygraphers need years of experience, re-training and re-certification to become proficient at administering and reading tests.

¶8. (SBU) As an illustration of this very point, ICE performed polygraph exams on one third of the polygraphers at SSP. Of the 100 tested, 75% failed the exam. Most who failed admitted to altering test results, manipulating exams or lying about disclosure. SSP reassigned those individuals to other areas not associated with creditability assessment. Our hope is that Mexico's decision to make CISEN the single authority for polygraph matters will allow GOM to establish training norms and implement process standards across agencies at the federal level.

¶9. (SBU) It is important to recall that the Mexican government mandated a dramatic increase in police, investigators and prosecutors over the next several years. Each of these federal officers must take part in a credibility assessment, which includes a polygraph exam. Additionally, officers currently employed must take an annual

polygraph exam. When DEA conducted 200 polygraphs of PGR's organized crime unit (SIEDO) for vetting purposes, 23% failed the exams. DEA understands from sources inside of PGR that the officers or applicants that fail the exam are fired or not hired. The sheer number of exams GOM law enforcement agencies want to conduct coupled with the limited amount of trained polygraphers is placing significant stress on the system. As a result, these agencies aim to train polygraphers as soon as possible.

¶10. (SBU) With the attention the polygraph program has drawn, vendors have bombarded the GOM with their high-priced wares. Some of these companies use less than honest pitches, including assertions the U.S. Embassy endorses their equipment. Neither the law enforcement community nor the bilateral polygraph working group endorses any un-proven equipment or techniques. Unfortunately, the GOM expends much time and resources dealing with these matters.

¶11. (SBU) Comment. As the U.S and Mexico build their polygraph training relationship, the bilateral polygraph working group will be the primary force that drives consistency and adherence to standards. Our combined efforts already allow us to make progress in promoting greater interagency program consistency when it comes to training and standards, as well as combating the manipulation of test results by senior leaders. The Mexican Government has demonstrated its commitment to the integrity of the program by replacing the head of CeDH, who was not fully implementing the recommendations of the working group and replacing or removing SSP officials who were not adhering to the newly established standards. While the polygraph program will take several years to generate highly trained polygraphers capable of maintaining and replicating standards across the Mexican interagency, the program has already contributed significantly to the creation of trusted units with which U.S. law enforcement agencies can work closely in investigating sensitive cases.

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